

Towards A Fresh Revolutionary Anarchist Group

Detroit Love and Rage

2000

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Insurrduction

Our goal, our strategy is the creation of a serious force for world wide social transformation. We desire, we believe necessary a movement that is both revolutionary and truly anti-authoritarian.

Internationally the working classes and oppressed have experienced years of defeat and retreat. When revolutions have occurred they have given birth to regimes militantly hostile to the self organization and freedom necessary for building a truly cooperative society. Many crimes and defeats have occurred under the banners of socialism/communism. State socialism has fallen from its once preeminent position as the theory and practice of working class liberation. Its failure has created a huge opening for anarchist ideas and initiatives. That is if anarchists strive to become serious players on a world-wide scale. Intensified nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism have already rushed to fill the vacuum. Bureaucratic middle class leftism however is not dead. It is alive amidst an array of trade union, community and activist formations. It will be a future player under the banner of a modernist secularism. It has new workerist, feminist and democratic clothes but is essentially a hybrid of Social Democratic and Communist Marxism for the new century.

The international anarchist youth movement that arose in the 80s has a potential for transforming itself and aiding in the spread of anarchist principles and actions deeper and wider layers of the worlds populations.

Right now in North America at least, there is a danger this promise will slip away. Despite the fact that anarchists are numerous, and key to movements like ARA, Zapatista and prisoner support. To those looking at us from the outside our movement doesn't go beyond a street level reactive diffuse radicalism. We need to maintain the militancy while updating, deepening and most importantly popularizing anarchist ideas and solutions to social questions. We need to be an independent pole in the debates/fights between left and right and within the left. We need to project our ideas in simple but not simplistic detail. We also need to better coordinate the areas of work we share in common and systematically take on new areas of struggle and outreach.

Anarchism must not be reduced to uncritical support for whatever struggles the injustices and inequalities of the system throws up. Our views need to be heard and goals mapped out. This takes organization as well as clarity of ideas.

Love and Rage, the most serious attempt to create such an organization on a North American scale has broken up. Still existing anarchist organizational projects hold no promise. Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA) barely exists and is too narrowly syndicalist. The IWW while home to many anarchists is de facto a social democratic organization that doesn't vote. The Anarchist Black Cross Federation (ABCF) is serious and methodically pursues its work in an important arena. Aside from the singularity of its approach its actual politics are not anarchist nor even anti-authoritarian. Its support for the Peruvian Communist Party, its uncritical support for nationalism and its retreat on queer liberation makes it little more than anarchist in label only

A fresh revolutionary anarchist group is needed. This paper is a proposal to kick-start discussion towards that end. We outline our interest in creating a federation of collectives united around firm anarchist/anti-authoritarian politics and outlook, oriented to the working classes and most oppressed, and active in building Anti-Racist Action as an anti-authoritarian mass movement. We look forward to discussion and criticism of these points and the four concrete proposals at the end.

Solidarity!

Revolutionary Anarchism

Any new revolutionary anarchist group needs to be built on a solid foundation of anti-authoritarian politics, method and structure.

Anarchist Politics

A necessary starting point in developing this foundation is having an outlook from below. One that looks at things not from the point of view of managing elite, but as a part of the oppressed majority.

An anti-authoritarian outlook is against all hierarchy, exploitation, privilege, and oppression, and distrustful and hostile towards all elites, intermediaries, and “leaders”. Our point of view should see our own liberation bound up with the complete freedom of everyone else, and be unsatisfied with half-measures and compromises. Our outlook should represent our “permanent state of rebellion” as Malatesta put it, against all authority.

From such an outlook revolutionary anarchist politics can be built. A political program of a new revolutionary anarchist group will need to be put together collectively by all those committed to such a project. We believe it should include these points:

1. *A Vision of Freedom*

An anarchist vision is one of a self-organized, cooperative, decentralized, ecological, and thoroughly democratic society. All social needs will be provided by a network of voluntary self-managed communes, councils and associations. People will work only for the benefit of the community, not any rich boss. Cultural, political, economic, educational, and sexual, freedom and experimentation will flourish.

2. *Opposition to White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Capitalism, Ecological Destruction and the State*

Revolutionary anarchists see and feel the need to organize against all the forms of domination that make up the authoritarian system we live under. No one aspect is a “lynch-pin” that when fought will automatically collapse the others, all must be struggled against, none can be ignored.

There is a crucial need to link the different resistance to oppression into a united movement for total freedom. Anarchists need to argue for a holistic approach struggle, and challenge all privilege and prejudice that help maintain the systems authority.

It is likely that the most revolutionary forces will come from people at the intersection of more than one oppression, people with “nothing to lose but our chains” such as working-class women, youth of color, immigrant poor, etc. This should not be interpreted dogmatically but as a general understanding that in considering revolutionary change it is the most oppressed who best represent the interest of humanity as a whole.

3. *Direct Action*

Meaningful gains come not from leaders on high, but from the peoples own direct action. This can take the form of marches and demonstrations, strikes and occupations, rebellions and uprisings. Direct action should be judged not by its legality but by its effectiveness in empowering its participants and exposing and weakening the system.

We reject lobbying and electoralism as a strategy for real change whether within the U.S. Democratic Party, or any new progressive or labor party, the PRD in Mexico, the NDP in Canada or the Parti Quebecois.

Electoralism breeds corruption, weakness, and defeat by focusing our energy away from the source of our collective power in the communities, workplaces and schools, on to individual attempts to enter the rules of hierarchy.

Direct Action, even when used for small reforms, gives people experience and confidence for future fights.

4. *Anti-statism, anti-elitism*

As anarchist revolutionaries we seek the abolition of state power. The state, government is by definition an elitist institution in which a small number of people massively privileged by their position make the decisions for all of society in the interests of themselves, corporate and military leaders and the rest of the ruling class.

Attempts to use the state for progressive purposes ultimately reinforce its authority by granting it legitimacy. Vanguard parties or religious sects whose own structure mimic the state's hierarchy are elitist projects that cannot bring about collective freedom.

We see the successful seizure of state power by one of these groups during a revolutionary upheaval not a final victory but as a final defeat for the popular struggle.

In place of the state we uphold the self-organized society — a federation of popular councils and committees and associations, such as have appeared in revolution after revolution. Instead of police and military we support peoples' militia — the arming of the working classes and oppressed — as a democratic form of civil defense and security.

5. *Reform and Revolution*

Our vision of a free and equal society will not be granted by the ruling class. It will need to be fought for and can only be achieved by overthrowing the ruling order, their institutions and culture.

This does not mean that we abstain from more limited day-to-day struggle. Just the opposite, these struggles for reform need to be built and supported whenever they mean real gains for the people and are not simply illusions. Struggles for reform are often peoples' first political experience and can provide rich lessons on the dynamics of power.

Our participation in such struggles for reform should be aimed at organizing the most mass militant action and uniting as much of the oppressed as possible in independent, democratic opposition, resisting cooptation and stifling bureaucratization.

Above all else we should tell people what we believe is the truth — about the limitations of reformist strategies, middle-class authoritarian leaders and the need for a revolutionary anarchist strategy.

A revolutionary challenge can only come from a strong alliance of movements of youth, women oppressed nationalities, the laboring classes, gays and lesbians, students and others. The movements will likely take the form of both mixed, multi-racial, multi-sexual, cross community organizations and autonomous groups representing specific groups' demands and needs. Building unity between the wide array of oppressed peoples will not be easy, it requires respect and trust and refusal of one political or social sector to dictate or "lead" the struggle as a whole.

These movements and counter institutions will prefigure the future society and should be organized on an extreme democratic self-organized basis.

A truly revolutionary situation will exist when the revolutionary forces, thru its organization, movements, counter-institutions and culture represent a dual power and have earned the participation and loyalty of a significant section of the people. In such a situation the forces of

authority will have no choice but to try and ruthlessly crush the movements or risk having their world washed away.

In this situation the revolutionary movements must be prepared to launch an insurrection — a coordinated uprising involving mass strikes, occupations of land, factories, schools, creation of liberated zones and armed actions against the forces of repression (military, police) in order to defend the revolution and our lives.

Anarchist Method

It is not easy to combine effective participation in popular struggle with raising revolutionary politics. We have no magic formula for this like the authoritarian Maoist mass-line or Trotskyist Transitional have to keep working at it, experimenting at it and critically evaluating our practice.

Here are some general points towards developing an Anarchist method:

- We claim no special access to universal truth. Our politics and strategy come from our ideas and experience, and will be enriched by dialoge and debate with those we meet at work, in school, in tha' hood and in struggle.
- See ourselves as equals, not superior or inferior to those around us. With a right to argue and organize for our perspectives on the best way forward. Not a right to impose our politics, nor an obligation to submit to others.
- Build independent, democratic, direct action formations that can maintain their autonomy, the ability to criticize official “leadership”, and to carry out action in the interest of its members and the community in which its based.
- Develop directly-democratic relationships within the struggle. Breaking down divisions between mental and manual labor, rooting revolutionary organizations amongst the most oppressed. Struggling to overcome sexist, racist, homophobic, ageist and elitist ideas and practice. Not necessarily equating anarchist organizational hegemony with self-organization and self activity.
- Work with all progressive forces while fiercely defending libertarian and self-managed struggle from cooptation by the system and authoritarian methods and structures. Exposing rising new elites and middle-class domination.
- Reject isolated escapist projects that do not relate to poor, working-class oppressed people and that do not attempt to challenge the system.
- Articulate what we believe to be truly possible, a world free from oppression and exploitation, war and famine, borders and heirarchy. A world where society's institutions are under the direct democratic control of the people.

Anarchist Structure

We believe a new continental revolutionary anarchist group should be built on the basis of a federation of autonomous collectives, bound together by a high degree of political and strategic unity, rather than Leninist-style cadre discipline.

A federation of collectives allows for people to use personal in addition to political affinity as a basis for association. Which can help build trust and develop directly democratic process on an intimate level. Collectives offer a space to develop theory in a more participatory manner. Each collective should be encouraged to write their own political statements beyond whatever the points of unity for the federation are. This will allow all of us to be a part of that process, and an opportunity to see where each other are actually at politically.

The autonomous character of the collective means that anarchist activists can apply our common politics flexibly, suited to their local situations and needs.

The major historic weakness of collectives and the reason Love and Rage mistakenly turned away from them is the tendency to become inwardly focused circles of friends that cannot easily integrate new comrades. To fight this tendency, each collective will need to find ways to bring new people in and spend time helping people organize their own groups.

In the federation we should encourage a culture of outreach and activity directed at the working classes and oppressed, of political interaction with everyday people in the neighborhoods, schools and workplaces.

Working groups that focus on particular struggles, or projects would include members of different collectives active in that arena and would allow us to project an anarchist presence in regional/ national/continental politics as well as local.

Whatever coordination/centralization is deemed necessary should flow from a growing trust, political and strategic unity not the other way around.

2th Class Outtha@ghetto

The anarchist movement has solid starts in prison work, Mexico solidarity, and especially the anti racist/anti-fascist movement, but our movement is still too rootless and marginal. Anarchism and anti-authoritarianism are without a significant base in the communities of the oppressed and working classes.

This needs to change if anti-authoritarian politics are to be influential in the upsurges ahead. One way we can start to do this is by getting jobs in multi-racial workplaces (factories, daycares, warehouses, hospitals, public transportation, etc.) and start carrying out a piece of our political activity at work.

We should not compartmentalize our activism and think we can only be involved in union issues at work. Our activism in workplaces should be an extension of our other political activity such as Anti Racist Action, etc. We are not for building dual unions but we are also not for getting bogged down in narrow trade union politics.

We should especially try and get into unionized workplaces for a couple of reasons. Being active in unionized shops will allow us to learn the ropes, see the dynamics of union politics (or lack thereof),

allow us some protection, and start developing extra-union strategies for the workplaces. Having a Union card also gives us access to all kinds of forums, conferences, and meetings with working

class audiences where we can carry out a fight against the bureaucrats and middle-class leftists who dominate the unions and their mass working class membership.

Our political priority is to build a personal-political base for ourselves around issues inside and outside of work especially fighting racism, sexism, and homophobia. Workers have families and live in neighborhoods, being involved with co-workers in these areas both personally and politically is most important in the early stages and the main way to build trust. People will be able to judge the sincerity, seriousness, and dedication behind all of our talk.

Such a personal base built thru struggle and trust in tandem with political discussion and anarchist propaganda can lay the basis for revolutionary groups in the workplace. This kind of “revolutionary nuclei” in workplaces and workers’ social settings should be our goal. Networks and federations of these type of groups can intervene jointly in broader union and community coalitions around issues in an anarchist fashion.

This perspective is counterposed to the trend of getting on staff, or full-time organizing for unions, community groups, etc. We don’t believe in being activists separate from the people with activity directed at them, but being a part of the “mass”, one of the people with our projects originating from within the workplaces and communities.

This is not to say that we should never have a full-time organizer amongst us (that might be the only way to connect with Haitian immigrants working in sweatshops for instance) or a lawyer, a grad student, or a box-car hopping crusty punk. All can make important contributions. But if we seriously desire to have the roots of anarchist revolution planted deeply, the collectives we build need to have an overwhelming working-class orientation and composition.

Anti-Racist Action: Building a mass anti-authoritarian movement

The growth and development of the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) network is something of a breakthrough for the anarchist movement.

While ARA is a multi-tendency movement, it has significant anarchist influence and participation. A number of ARA chapters were founded and organized by anarchists and anarchists have played a strong role in maintaining the network’s autonomous, decentralized structure as well as contributing to its radicalization thru initiating Copwatch, mobile tactics against the KKK and white power concerts, Mumia and Zapatista solidarity, action against the Christian Right, producing and distributing anarchist propaganda.

Over the last five years ARA has grown from three chapters to approximately 100. Network chapters have organized or participated in dozens of actions, many quite mass and militant, against KKK and neo-nazis, in defense of Mumia, against anti-choice bigots, and opposing Clinton’s war plans against Iraq. ARA chapters have organized community meetings and dinners, concerts and parties, put out ‘zines, flyers, and stickers and done a lot of spraypainting. ARA has met tens of thousands of anti-racist youth by tabling at concerts large and small, 30 chapters and the network have web pages, and Vibe magazine just did a two page spread on the group.

Anarchists are an important part of one of the fastest growing movements in North America. While there exist strong non-anarchist tendencies in the network, ARA is generally an anti-authoritarian phenomenon

This will not automatically remain so, given the onslaught of attention ARA is already starting to receive from social-democratic and Marxist-Leninist groups after our emergence on the national/continental political scene. Anarchists will need to be organized in order to continue building ARA on an anti-authoritarian basis, and move ahead on new initiatives. Love and Rage’s

Anti-Fascist Working Group (AFWG) can be seen as something of a model for what we need now. For a while the AFWG (with members in the Minneapolis, Detroit, Lansing, Flint, and Harlem Chapters) successfully coordinated its work within the network, promoting revolutionary anarchist politics and outlook, and encouraging other anti-authoritarians to orient to ARA.

Some of our immediate tasks besides maintaining and helping organize new chapters are:

- Elaborate more fully and concretely our vision and strategy for anarchist revolution. Launch a 'zine to be aimed at the ARA movement as a whole that articulates anarchist analysis of world events and ARA activities providing a forum for anti-authoritarians to discuss and debate strategy.
- Support a second attempt to add defense of womens reproductive freedom, and opposition to institutional racism such as police brutality to ARA network's points of unity. Last year a majority of chapters, but not the 2/3s needed supported the proposal. The vote, in which Trotskyists and beyond-anarchism types opposed, created something of an anarchist/non-anarchist divide at the conference
- Take on the tendency among some in the network to see the state or aspects of the state as some time allies against the fascists. Work to establish a harder anti-state outlook and practice..
- Deepen ARA's membership and activity in working-class and oppressed communities. Struggle ti transform ARA into more of a multi-racial movement. We can only make a helpful contribution towards this by our own individual and collective efforts at getting rooted
- Support increasing the internal democracy and coordination of network projects
- Continue to point to the Christian Right as a major threat, promote actions local and regional against active players and visible symbols of their agenda.
- Discuss strategy on taking on KKK rallies and their protectors in blue. Given our enormous experience with these demos we need to have more of a concious plan and coordination of action.
- Add economic racism as one of the fronts on which ARA is known to fight. The Detroit chapter has made this one of their primary focuses.
- Start raising carefully the concept of armed self-defense against the fasists. We cannot allow the Right to maintain a monopoly on the politics and practice of self-defense. Start training our own members in this legal tactic.
- Expand ARA geographically, especially into the U.S. South and Southwest, Quebec, and perhaps Mexico.

In ARA, besides former Love and Ragers, there are anarchists from the former Network of Anarchist Collectives, Anarchist Black Cross Network, independant anti-authoritarians and RASH skins. Working together within ARA will give us oppurtunity to learn where each other are coming from, work on common projects, and see who is down for building a fresh revolutionary anarchist group.

Some Concrete Proposals

A new revolutionary anarchist group won't come together overnight. It will be the product of discussion and debate, experience working together and eventually, hopefully some common political and strategic affinity. This paper is one such effort at sparking ideas, action and unity. Here are some other concrete proposals:

1. Launch a 'zine aimed generally but not exclusively at the Anti-Racist Action movement, taking up the issues within that movement from an anarchist perspective, reporting on and analyzing major actions and new developments, outlining anarchist approaches and goals, and reviewing books and pamphlets. It should also have a heavy emphasis on cultural coverage and criticism of every form of pop and rebel culture: from "He Got Game" to the Lilith festival; from Goodie Mob to "Ellen"; from subway graffiti to the Detroit Red Wings, and all from an anti-authoritarian angle.
2. Support a new anarchist journal. Some former members of the Revolutionary Socialist League and Love & Rage are launching a new journal to be called *Liberty* or *Utopia* to concentrate on developing anarchist theory, a much needed task and one that is open to others including the younger set who share that focus.
3. Connect with the international anarchist movement. Try to identify, dialogue with, aid, and publicize explicitly anarchist forces in other nations especially the emerging ones in the third world and eastern Europe. Develop non-sectarian relationships with all the different international associations of revolutionary anarchists and anti-authoritarians.
4. Hold an anarchist educational conference in Detroit over Thanksgiving. All though this meeting would not try and launch a new group, it would be a chance for those of us with a generally similar orientation to hold discussions, present workshops, swap propaganda, and party like its 1999.

Who We Are

We are long term anti-racist/anti-fascist activists and revolutionary anti-authoritarians. We have been active in Anti-Racist Action fighting the Ku Klux Klan and neo-nazis, combatting the Christian Right, confronting police brutality, and challenging the racist redevelopment of the City of Detroit. We have also been involved in struggles in the workplace at Chrysler and United Parcel Service.

We are former members of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, which recently collapsed after a section of the group rejected anarchism and embraced authoritarian politics and dishonest methods borrowed from Marxism-Leninism.

We continue to hold out hope for revolution from below against all forms of authority.

This is a small contribution towards uniting those of us who feel similar.

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